



## CRIME &amp; JUSTICE



# Recent cases against ex-guards provide a rare view of the disorder and violence plaguing Philly's jails

The trial of former Corrections Officer Ivory Cousins showed how the tenuous situation in Philly's overcrowded jails can quickly devolve into chaos.



Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Northeast Philadelphia.

Alejandro A. Alvarez / Staff Photographer

by Chris Palmer

Published April 15, 2025, 5:00 a.m. ET

Moments after a group of men burst into Demetrius Jones' jail cell trying to steal his belongings, they began punching and kicking him as he lay on the ground, breaking his eye socket and leaving his face swollen and bruised.

And when a corrections officer, Ivory Cousins, finally responded to the melee inside Philadelphia's Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility, Jones — who was jailed on drug charges — said the guard didn't call for help or seek to get him medical treatment.

Instead, he said, Cousins told him to clean his blood off the floor — and prepare himself in case his assailants came back.

"She kept saying she wanted me to fight those guys," Jones testified last week, later adding: "I could've died in that cell room."

ADVERTISEMENT

Philadelphia's jails have experienced [a variety of overlapping crises](#) over the last several years, with a critical staff shortage leaving units, prisoners, and even guards vulnerable to [deaths, assaults, riots](#), and more.

Several recent court cases against former corrections officers — including [the prosecution of Cousins](#) — have provided a rare window into how the tenuous situation in the overcrowded facilities can quickly devolve into chaos.

Cousins was tried in federal court last week on charges including deprivation of rights and falsification of records. Witnesses including Jones told jurors that after she declined to seek medical treatment for Jones when he was assaulted in August 2019, she locked him in his cell for an hour. Surveillance video

showed Cousins leaving Jones in his room as other prisoners wandered about outside.

Then, when Cousins came back, witnesses said, she went inside the cell and pepper-sprayed Jones, irritating the wounds on his face. And although her colleagues ultimately got Jones medical treatment, prosecutors said Cousins created false reports about what happened that night while trying to cover up the original fight in order to avoid being blamed for it.

Cousins “had a sworn duty to protect inmates,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Jessica Rice told jurors, but “failed to do that over and over and over again.”

Jurors found Cousins guilty on all counts, and she faces the possibility of years behind bars. She is scheduled to be sentenced in July.

Other city jail guards have been charged in recent years with crimes including [attacking prisoners](#) and [smuggling in contraband](#) for inmates, including weapons and drugs.

Former Corrections Officer Breyanna Cornish, for example, is accused of bringing opioids, knives, and cell phones into the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center in 2021 in exchange for about \$10,000 in bribes. Cornish’s trial is scheduled to begin in federal court next month.

Ronald C. Granville, meanwhile, has pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing for participating in the [brutal beating of a pretrial detainee](#) in 2020 — a crime that prosecutors say involved four other guards and sent the man to the hospital for emergency surgery.

The U.S. Attorney's Office over the last five years has charged at least four corrections officers with crimes including conspiracy, falsifying records, and deprivation of rights.

In addition, the district attorney's office in recent years has filed similar charges against several corrections officers, including one who was sentenced to prison last year [for crimes including conspiracy and bribery](#), and two others who were [charged in December](#) with running separate smuggling and bribery operations.

“These correctional officers were helping to fuel a market within the Philadelphia jails for cell phones and narcotics,” Assistant District Attorney Joseph Lanuti said when those two guards were charged. “This poses a danger to inmates, correctional officers, and the community at-large.”

Officials at the union representing city correctional officers declined to comment for this article. In the past, union leaders have said that a long-standing staffing crisis has left corrections officers facing challenging — and often dangerous — working conditions.

John Mitchell, a spokesperson for the Philadelphia Department of Prisons, said in a statement that officials do not tolerate corruption and will continue working with law enforcement partners to investigate any such allegations.

“We hold our staff accountable when they violate the constitutional rights of our incarcerated population,” he said.

The Philadelphia Department of Prisons has made some progress in recent months addressing its staffing crisis, which officials say is a key aspect of regaining a sense of order in the jails. Vacancies were down by about 5% as of December, according to a monitoring report filed in federal court last month, and officials have also worked [to reduce the number of people behind bars](#) by nearly 20% — another tactic to address the imbalance between guards and prisoners.

Leigh Owens, director of education and advocacy for the Pennsylvania Prison Society, said that disorder is sometimes viewed as “part of the carceral culture. It’s part of the culture of carceral facilities,” and that incidents involving correctional officers can fuel the notion that lawlessness in jail is inevitable.

But “that aspect of it is something that needs to change,” Owens said. “Our basic premise is we need to protect health, safety, and dignity of incarcerated people.”

ADVERTISEMENT

## ABOUT US

---

About The Inquirer  
Diversity & Inclusion  
Advertise  
Contact Us  
Licensing & Permissions  
Photo Reprints  
Newspapers in Education  
Jobs & Internships  
Delivery Jobs  
Inquirer Events  
Acel Moore Workshops  
Newsroom Staff  
Help and Feedback

## MARKETPLACE

---

Inquirer Store  
Job Listings  
All Classifieds  
Death Notices  
Legal Notices  
Gift Subscriptions

## NEWS & INFO

---

News  
Sports  
Entertainment  
Business  
Health  
Food  
Life  
Opinion  
Philly First  
Archives  
Special Reports  
Site Map

## E-EDITIONS

---

The Inquirer  
The Daily News  
Subscriber Services

## MOBILE APPS

---

Apple iOS

Google Android



© 2025 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC

[Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Cancellation Policy](#) / [California Notice](#)

[California residents do not sell my data request](#)